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ON

RICHARD SHARP KISSAM, A. M., M. D.,

READ BEFORE THE

New York Academy of Medicine,

DECEMBER 3D, 1862.

BY

AUGUSTUS KINSLEY GARDNER, A. M., M. D.

NEW YORK:
C. A. ALVORD, PRINTER.
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EULOGY

FRIENDSHIP has its pains and penalties, as well as its joys and pleasures! We who bask in the warm rays of the meridian sun, must also bear the chills attendant upon its total absence.

Some there are who, gregarious, find only their pleasures in community—loving only to share with a multitude—one of the thousands thronging a gay assembly; others, more solitary and introspective, desire only self-consciousness, felicitous in the happy possession of a solitary excellence.

We who possessed the friendship of Dr. RICHARD SHARP KISSAM, possessed a Kohinoor, many-sided, prismatic, sparkling with glories—but not for all. Those only saw it who were the first admitted within the veil. Acquaintanceship he had with many, kind feelings and good wishes for all, but his friendship —those who attained to it scarce knew they had it, even while most desirous of it.

The late lamented JOHN W. FRANCIS and the Nestor

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of American surgery, VALENTINE MOTT, were the most conspicuous among the few who were honored by his respect and affection.

May it be granted to me in fitting language to portray the shining virtues of one of the purest, most sensitive, best, of the members of the New York Academy of Medicine, who, having finished their work upon earth, do now rest from their labors.

According to THATCHER (Biography of Eminent American Physicians), the grandfather of DR. KISSAM was BENJAMIN KISSAM, a practising lawyer in the city of New York; his father, whose name he bore, was one of the most distinguished surgeons that ever blessed this city, and honored the profession of medicine by his scientific attainments and labors. He was the third of five brothers, and the most distinguished of two who embraced the profession of medicine. He was himself born in 1763. He not only studied in New York, but, matriculating in Edinburgh —then the leading medical school, if not of Europe, certainly of the kingdom of Great Britain—he spent five years in unwearied labors and professional toil. He received the doctorate in 1789, when he published his inaugural dissertation *De Rheumatismo.* From Edinburgh he repaired to the continent, from whence he returned to this his native city, commencing practice here in 1791. For thirty years he

was a most distinguished ornament to the profession, and his renown as a surgeon was founded upon the promptitude and success of his operations. As a lithotomist he was particularly celebrated. It is stated that in his sixty-five operations for the stone, three only were fatal. It is also recorded of him, as an extraordinary performance, that "at an early period of his practice he had recourse to tapping for dropsy of the ovarium with success. In one case nearly six quarts of water were drawn off; the patient afterwards proved pregnant, and became the mother of five children." Upon the formation of the medical faculty of Columbia College, he was appointed, and declined the honor of, Professor of Botany. For thirty years he was a surgeon of the New York Hospital. He died October, 1822, in the 59th year of his age. To a mind admirably adapted by nature for the practice of his profession, clear, acute and sagacious, he united a firmness of nerve which was equal to the urgency and magnitude of any undertaking.

Such are some of the characteristics of the father, and, no doubt, such professional excellencies were incentives to the son, following in the same path, bearing his name, and inheriting many of his characteristics. He was born in Fulton Street in the city of New York, October 2d, 1808. But few particulars of his early life are now known, and these have been dili-

gently gathered with friendly solicitude, and incorporated in a biographical sketch, by Dr. SAMUEL W. FRANCIS, and may be found in the *American Medical Times* for December 14th, 1861. I can hope to add but little to this exhaustive summary. At an early age he was placed under the charge of Rev. Mr. HUNTINGTON, from whose care he was transferred to a school at South Farms, Connecticut. At another period he was at school in Tappan, New Jersey, distinguished as being the place of the confinement, trial and execution of André. The quiet serenity of this country town, which, in its obscurity, seems to be ignorant of the existence of the great heart of American commerce, pulsating with the circulation of the New World, but a few miles distant, together with the historic associations of the place, exerted an influence of some importance over the future man. Often in our friendly conversations has he referred to those days.

About the year 1824, the name of RICHARD SHARP KISSAM was inscribed upon the matriculating list of Union College, Schenectady, New York, then presided over by Dr. MOTT. Here he remained but a single year, when he was transferred to Washington (now Trinity) College, Hartford, Connecticut, during the presidency of Dr. BROWNELL. He did not, however, complete his collegiate course, but in 1827 commenced the rigorous study of medicine in the office

of Dr. MASON F. COGSWELL, of Hartford. How well the young student availed himself of the distinguished abilities of his teacher, and the opportunities for observation from his association with Dr. Todd, physician of the Retreat for the Insane, may be judged by his graduating thesis on Iritis, in 1830, presented to the professors of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, New York. This monograph, although written more than thirty years since, is still fresh and up to the times, as it was then in advance of his age. Many of the novel views then first propounded, are still *questiones vexatæ* among the ophthalmologists of the present time. This paper was printed by the HARPERS, and deservedly receiving no little attention, Dr. KISSAM founded an Eye and Ear Infirmary in Hartford, where he first established himself, which was ever full, and large numbers of patients came to consult him for diseases of these organs, from the most remote states of the Union as well as from the vicinity. At this time he became town physician, a position of both profit and honor. Here, too, he married a lady of this town, Miss JULIA MARIA COOKE, with whom he lived happily, and who now, with one son and three daughters, lives to deplore his loss. He there united himself to the First Congregational Church.

In 1834, becoming dissatisfied with the narrow

limits of a small town, and also feeling an antipathy to the practice of a specialty, in which his general practice seemed destined to end, and which was also lucrative in more than an ordinary degree, he determined to leave Hartford for a larger field of operation. The failing health of his cousin, DANIEL WHITEHEAD KISSAM, M. D., and who urged his coming to New York and taking his business—furthered this desire. He accordingly removed hither, and settled in Chambers Street, where he immediately entered upon an extended practice, his pecuniary receipts amounting to $5,000 the first year. The cares of a general practice did not prevent his investigation of eye diseases, and in 1838 he performed successfully the difficult operation of transplantation of the cornea. (See Report in New York Journal of Medicine, March, 1844, and WALTON'S Operative Ophthalmic Surgery, p. 381.)

The present medical condition of Bellevue Hospital is known to all, and New York may well point to this, its main pauper hospital, with a just pride, as among the most extended, best arranged, and most ably conducted institutions in the world. But few, however, of those here present can remember its condition twenty years since. Contracted in space, wanting in cleanliness, its nurses mainly composed of convalescent women of the town, and others committed for small

pital of Bellevue, with its staff of officers and its working organization, is now unequalled in extent, efficiency, and results. This sprang from the laborious efforts of our late fellow, whose premature death we now deplore.

Somewhere about the year 1840, Dr. KISSAM operated for the radical cure of ovarian dropsy by the large incision. I have found the case fully written out, in the clear, distinct style of the writer, free from hyperbole, and not too succinct for a full comprehension of the subject. The case is without further date than that the operation was on the 5th, and that the patient died on the 13th, from inflammation, apparently coming on on the eighth day. The whole amount evacuated was fifty-six pounds. The ligature passed around the blood-vessels of the pedicle was of "leather cut close to the knot and left for absorption. The base of the tumor was secured by a thread ligature passing out of the wound." This operation at the time it was performed was one undertaken by none except by surgeons of nerve and skill, and of such reputation as could stand the consequences of the very probable death of the patient. I cannot find that the case has been published, although the notes are complete, as if for that purpose.

About this time, too, Dr. KISSAM entered upon medical teaching. A circular now before me (dated Oct.

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Alms-House, averages about four hundred. These are under the immediate care of the resident physician, who commits them to six assistants. These assistants are very young men, whose object in going to the establishment is to learn their profession.

"Now it is a well established fact that each of these assistants has the sole care of from fifty to one hundred patients, and that, too, immediately upon their entrance into the hospital, and frequently make their very first prescription there. Is it right that inexperience should be intrusted with disease in its severest form? Is it humane? Is it just? Is it proper? Even if called upon, the resident physician cannot visit daily each patient. The greatest physician who ever existed could not visit one-half and do them justice.

"But more than this is required of the resident; he has the superintendence of sick children at the Farms, of the Insane Asylum, and of the diseased committed to the Penitentiary. Need more be said to prove the absolute necessity of a medical reform?"

This paper, from which I have quoted the above paragraph for its historic date, goes on to propose measures for reform, and among them, as a leading feature, the organization of a staff of six physicians and six surgeons. This plan, after a somewhat prolonged contest and after considerable political wire-pulling, was entirely successful, and the model hos-

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retiring, avoiding rather than seeking conspicuity, his affectionate nature developed itself in the sanctity of his own home, and in the bosom of families of a nature akin to his own, who found in him the puissant physician and the genial, sympathizing friend.

Brief, however, as is the record of his public actions, more curt still must be the summary of his home life. In it there are no startling incidents, scarce any thing to interrupt the account of a placid life, hallowed by domestic joys. A congenial wife was there, ready with heartfelt sympathy to foster every plan of duty or pleasure; and children, whose personal beauty, amiable, affectionate dispositions and cultivated minds, sweetened every toil, dissipated corroding cares, and nerved the weary to fresh exertion. This routine of daily joys was broken only in a few instances. The death of an infant son, BUSHNELL KISSAM, in 1839, was the first interruption to his domestic felicity; but a heavier blow was experienced in the decease of his eldest son, R. S. KISSAM, Jr., a young man, in person markedly resembling his father, and of many individual excellencies, promising to develop into a notable manhood. After a short illness he died in Paris, whither he had gone to finish his medical education. From this stroke the father never recovered, while its immediate effect was remarkable. His black, curly hair, from thence became sprinkled with silver, he stood

mended "Dr. KISSAM as a physician in whom they may repose entire confidence."

In 1847 Dr. KISSAM was appointed the Medical Examiner of the Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company (New York Agency) which responsible position he held till his death. The flourishing condition of this institution is in no slight degree owing to his perspicacity and professional skill. In 1850 the honorary degree of A. M. was conferred upon him by his old alma mater, Trinity. The honorary LL. D.'s have been sprinkled about upon those less worthy, and less erudite.

In 1854 he was appointed consulting surgeon to the New York Infirmary for indigent women and children, and the managers of this beneficent institution, in their annual report, "while expressing their regret at his loss, gratefully acknowledge the steady kindness and skill of the services which he so long rendered the institution in that capacity."

Dr. KISSAM joined this Academy among the earliest of its members, was for many years the chairman of its Board of Trustees, and represented it at one or more of the meetings of the National Medical Convention.

We have thus sketched the public career of our departed fellow. This was short, and little conspicuous, for, modest in his estimate of himself, naturally

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steady in nerve, no man brought better resources to the bedside of the afflicted. He knew that he knew what he knew; and more important still, he knew that he did not know what he did not know.

Condensed and deficient as is this sketch of the personal peculiarities of our late fellow, I cannot refrain from alluding more distinctly to that most distinguishing feature in his character, already hinted at, which acted as the balance-wheel of his whole life. The ever-living, extreme sensitiveness of Dr. KISSAM, acute to a degree rarely witnessed, was conspicuously present in every act, and this was no morbid development. It was based upon simple honesty, and that rule, so easily committed by the lips, so hard to be learned by heart: "To do to others as we would that they should do to us." It was this simple rule, rooted into the life, that prevented a man of naturally strong feelings from ever speaking injuriously of another from the ambition of office, "when there are so many better capable of filling it than I," as he more than once said to me when speaking of dignities in this Academy. It is this precept, so simple, yet so hard to learn, so important as to be deemed alone worthy of the mission of the Son of God to his beloved children of earth—that now renders the honest lips of the members of this Academy, his associates in our notoriously quarrelsome profession, incapable

of saying that their own feelings were ever wounded by a breath from his lips, or that they ever heard him speak ill of another. Would to God that we, one and all, might emulate this so rare excellence!

During the spring of 1861, his health markedly failed, and with weakness of body he became irritable, and the iniquitous proceedings which ushered in the internecine strife which yet rages undiminished, greatly excited him. He could not read or speak upon the matter without great and prolonged excitement, and could scarcely refrain, weak as he was, from volunteering and offering his time and talents to his country. His only son he sent in his place, who, when the father lay upon the sick-bed and stark in death, at the age of sixteen, was, as a corporal, gallantly serving his country.

During the summer he spent a week in the vicinity of Washington, nursing this son sick with typhus, and this respite from toil, and the change of air and scene, seemed to have exerted a most beneficial influence upon him; but the hopes thus encouraged for a restoration to health, were too speedily forever dissipated; for on the 22d of November he was seized with typhoid-pneumonia, and early became aware of his critical condition. Still, not till after he had visited the most important of his patients that day, did he take to his bed and send for the medical at-

tendance which his friends (Drs. ALONZO CLARK, A. K. GARDNER, and subsequently VALENTINE MOTT) hastened to render him. In the progress of this his final illness, there was little peculiar. The disease did not advance beyond the congestive stage, but from its incipiency, great stimulation was found requisite to overcome the prostrating influences of the malady. He died at noon on the 28th.

Some of the incidents of that death-bed are worthy of record, inasmuch as they exemplify the character of the individual, the traits of a true physician and the highest attributes of humanity.

Recognizing, from the outset, the serious character of his illness, and conscious that his enfeebled constitution would illy resist severe disease, particularly if prolonged, he unconsciously, perhaps even to himself, accepted his condition with resignation. Not to any but to his wife and daughter did he mention even the possibility of the disease being fatal, or make any reference to the coming change of the animal life to the spiritual one. To the former he said, on the day that he was taken ill, that he should not recover. There seemed only to be a fear of delirium, and an evident effort to preserve the command of his intellect unimpaired, and with such success that up to his last breath he spoke with the utmost correctness. Soon after his attack there was considerable

difficulty in enunciating, and his natural indistinctness of articulation was so increased, that even to the most attentive ears of loved ones familiar with his tones, his meaning was often lost. It was painful, when during the last twenty-four hours the death-rattle made his imperfect articulation observable even to himself, it was painful to hear him patiently spell the doubtful words, devoting to each letter one of his few remaining breaths and a perceptible portion of his little remaining strength.

The ever-present consideration for the feelings of others, and the untiring willingness to submit to any personal inconvenience in order to please, how much more to materially benefit, those near and dear to him, was exemplified in Dr. KISSAM, when death had already seized him with his icy grasp, and of this I record an illustration. His eldest daughter, summoned by the telegraph, had arrived, and anxiously had suggested, that some thick gum-water, prepared in a certain manner, and which had often relieved her own children rattling with a croupy cough, might do some good. Knowing the extreme difficulty Dr. KISSAM experienced in swallowing, and the absolute inertness of the proposed draught, I had said as much; but the loving daughter, hoping against hope, turned to her gasping father, with overflowing eyes, and said, "Won't you try it, father?" Upon re-

ceiving an answer of assent, she hurried from the room to prepare it, when the doctor turned as if to apologize to me for overruling my decision, and said, "It is perfectly useless, but it will please Julia," and when it was prepared, with a great effort he raised himself upon his elbow, seized the cup with a tremulous hand, and after repeated efforts drank its contents. What a contrast to the animosity, malignant spirit or sullen indifference marking the last hours of some! And such actions were the habit of his life, not the accidental promptings of an evanescent emotion!

Two nights before his death, deeply interested in the fate of the nation, he asked me the news. Feeling that absolute quiet of both mind and body was all-important, I briefly gave him a summary of some skirmish reported in the evening papers, saying to him, as I left, that with this condensed account he might rest quiet until the morning brought particulars; but he spent two hours, till one A. M., for himself reading the more extended account in the *Post*.

Dr. KISSAM watched his own case with the same careful observation which he manifested throughout his professional career. During the night before his death, he sought with tremulous finger and ill-directed hand, to feel his own pulse, and noted its rapid, irregular and feeble beatings; raised his hands, al-

ready damp and cold with the chill of death, to his dimmed eyes, noted the blueness of the nails, and said to me, "I shan't last more than an hour." Several hours later, after being revived by increasing amounts of stimulants, he repeated this self-examination and feebly articulated, "I was mistaken this morning, but I shall be dead in half an hour." Shortly after Dr. MOTT came in, he recognized him, and we retired for a short time. When we returned, he was tranquilly lying upon one side, and I said, "Dr. MOTT thinks it desirable for you to take some carbonate of ammonia; are you willing to do so ?" He opened his eyes, said "yes." Dr. MOTT immediately turned, left the room and descended to the ground-floor, I following. We had scarcely reached it, when a sudden scream that "father is dead," speedily recalled us. It was so, and thus calmly and rapidly was the transition from time to eternity accomplished.

The subsequent special meeting of this Academy, called to take action upon the death of one of its chief officers, the resolutions adopted, the attendance in a body at his funeral, are duly chronicled in its proceedings. Few who were then present, will ever forget the church, crowded with his friends and his late patients, with tear-filled eyes looking their last upon him through whose skill and devotion they had been in past years kept from the grave, whither they were

now about to conduct him, and by us, his associates in the profession and this Academy, who in solemn procession had followed his remains through the streets—whose Sabbath stillness was disturbed by the clatter of our footsteps—and up the long-drawn aisle, while the organ sounded the requiem of the dead.

The affectionate father, the esteemed friend, the cherished physician, the erudite scholar, the upright man, our honored fellow, has gone before us. He whose facile pen but so lately described the last illness of his friend, our late honored President, Dr. JOHN W. FRANCIS, and whose lips, from this desk, uttered those words of affection, now, in turn, requires the same services from another. Fortunately, his own spotless life, running through more than fifty years, unsullied by an unfriendly, unprofessional, irreligious act, supplies the deficiencies of the appointed eulogist. When our books shall be written up, and we have gone to our great account, may our friends find as few blots, as few entries upon the wrong side, which we would, then too late, gladly erase, and may the trial-balance stand as assured before the All-Seeing Eye.

Stat sua cuique dies, breve et irreparabile tempus.
Omnibus est vitæ ; sed famam extendere factis.
Hoc virtutis opus.

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